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SUBJECT: MFA OFFICIAL DISCUSSES GOAM-GOG BORDER
DEMARCATION, VERKHNIY LARS BORDER CLOSING

REF: YEREVAN 920

Classified By: DCM A. F. Godfrey for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) The Georgian and Armenian governments have delimited between 100 and 110 kilometers of the border between the two countries, and the entire project should be completed by year's end, according to the director of the MFA's Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Department. Though the states do not fully agree on which border to use (the Soviet Union periodically redrew the republics' borders), CIS Department Director Vardan Hakobyan told us there are no major conflicts that would hold up the demarcation, which was begun in 1995. Hakobyan said Armenia had complained to visiting Russian Transportation Minister Igor Levitin about the sudden closure of the Russian-Georgian border, but received no assurances of compensation or speedy re-opening. End Summary.

MFA OFFICIAL DISCUSSES ARMENIAN-GEORGIAN BORDER ...

¶2. (C) The last concrete, geographic demarcation of the approximately Georgian-Armenian border was completed in 1929, Hakobyan said. It is this border the Armenians would like to use, because it includes concrete geographic coordinates. The Georgians would prefer to use a border drawn on a map in the Kremlin in the late 1940s. Hakobyan said there is no major territorial difference between the two borders, but that the 1929 border would be easier to follow. During the last bilateral meeting on the issue, the two sides agreed to combine the demarcations, using the coordinates provided in the 1929 border, and filling in the gaps using the 1940s border. Because the border is not officially delimited, its length is unclear. Hakobyan estimated the length at 190 to 200 kilometers, while the CIA World Factbook puts it at 164 kilometers.

¶3. (C) Hakobyan noted that all former Soviet republics face the same demarcation problem because the Soviet regime was unconcerned about the legitimacy of its internal borders. He said that, while there is the potential for a minor tussle over a church or monument located on the border, the sides do not expect any major problems. He cited the example of a small Armenian village considered to be on the Armenian side, and whose residents conduct agriculture on soil considered to be on the Georgian side. He said it is possible the border would be drawn to include the farmland on the Armenian side, however, he said no efforts would be made to draw the border

to annex ethnic Armenian villages in Georgia. "Citizens of Georgia will remain citizens of Georgia," he said.

... AND RUSSIAN-GEORGIAN BORDER ...

14. (C) We used the meeting with Hakobyan to find out the latest on how the closure of the Russian border (reftel) was affecting Armenia. Hakobyan opined that Russia's decision to close the border at Kazbegi-Verkhniy Lars would hurt its image in the eyes of the Armenian populace. He noted that Russia had agreed to notify Armenia three months in advance of closing Verkhniy Lars, but that they only had given two hours' advance notice. "This means that the public is already starting to have problems," he said in Russian. "If we are strategic partners, they should have worked something out." Hakobyan said that during the July 11 visit of Russian Transportation Minister Levitin, the GOAM pointed out that Russia had broken its promise regarding advance notification, and raised the question of compensation of losses due to the abrupt closing. Levitin agreed to look into the issue, Hakobyan said. Levitin told the press July 11 that Moscow "will try to address" Armenia's concerns regarding the closure, but did not publicly promise a speedy re-opening.

15. (C) Hakobyan said Armenia was encouraged by Georgia's decision to allow Armenian cargo and passengers stranded on the Russian side to pass through the unofficial border near Tskhinvali in South Ossetia, though he noted that the offer

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was only good through July 14.

... AND GEORGIAN-ARMENIAN RELATIONS

YEREVAN 00000938 002 OF 002

16. (C) Hakobyan said Georgian and Armenian relations were generally friendly. He said that, while there were problems now and again (and he cited Georgia's use of the Georgia-Ukraine-Azerbaijan-Moldova (GUAM) forum to liken Nagorno-Karabakh to Abkhazia and South Ossetia), they were easily resolved. He stressed that Armenia views Georgia as a lifeline, given the closed borders to the east and west, and said that it is clearly in Armenia's interests for Russia and Georgia to get along. He said that the key to balancing Armenian and Georgian relations was for Georgia to keep its nose out of N-K and not get too cozy with Azerbaijan. Hakobyan said Armenia tried to take the same approach with respect to Russia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.
EVANS